

1-1-1970

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Recommended Citation

Stewart, Mary Margaret (1969) "Adam Smith and the Contesse de Boufflers," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 7: Iss. 3, 184–187.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol7/iss3/7>

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Adam Smith and the Comtesse de Boufflers

In a letter to his publisher William Strahan, dated 13 November 1776, Adam Smith wrote: "I have received £ 300 of the copy money of the first edition of my book [*Wealth of Nations*]. But as I got a good number of copies to make presents of from Mr. Cadell, I do not exactly know what balance may be due to me. I should therefore be glad he would send me the account. I shall write him upon this subject."¹ One of these copies of the first edition was sent to David Hume; on 1 April 1776 Hume wrote his friend: "Euge! Belle! Dear Mr Smith: I am much pleas'd with your Performance; and the Perusal of it has taken me from a State of great Anxiety. It was a Work of so much Expectation, by yourself, by your Friends, and by the Public, that I trembled for its Appearance; but am now much relieved."² We can now verify that another presentation copy went to the Comtesse de Boufflers-Rouverel. In the Gettysburg College Library there is a first edition of *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* with the following inscription: "For the Countess Dowager of Boufflers from the Author."

The Comtesse, who had married Edouard, Marquis de Boufflers-Rouverel in February 1746 and then later became the mistress of the Prince de Conti, was one of the most prominent Anglophiles in Paris. Through the years both in Paris and England, she met, entertained, and was admired by several English men of letters—Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, Horace Walpole, Edward Gibbon, among others.³ As hostess of the Prince de Conti's salon in the Temple and at his country house, L'Isle Adam, she entertained many English guests. Her name, however, is most often associated with the name of David Hume, with whom she began a correspondence in 1761. In

¹ John Rae, *The Life of Adam Smith by John Rae* [1895] With an Introduction "Guide to John Rae's *Life of Adam Smith*" by Jacob Viner. Reprints of Economic Classics (New York, 1965), p. 308.

² J. Y. Greig, ed., *The Letters of David Hume* (Oxford, 1932), II, 311. John Rae wrote in 1895 that the presentation copy "with its inscription, probably still exists, having been possessed for a time by the late Mr. Babbage." (*Life of Adam Smith*, p. 286).

³ While in London in 1763, she visited Samuel Johnson (George Birkbeck Hill, ed., *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, rev. and enlarged by L. F. Powell (Oxford, 1934), II, 405-6). After Boswell met the Comtesse at The Hague on 6 June 1764, he described her as "quite the French fine lady" (*Boswell in Holland 1763-1764*, ed. F. A. Pottle (New York, 1952), p. 273). The most memorable description of the Comtesse, however, has been given by Horace Walpole in

the spring of 1763, she visited England with the prime purpose, according to Lord Elbank, of meeting Hume. During the years Hume lived in Paris (1763-65), she became his intimate friend, perhaps even his mistress. After his return to Scotland, the Comtesse and Hume continued their correspondence until his death in August 1776.⁴

Adam Smith first met the Comtesse de Boufflers when he visited France in the spring of 1766. On 6 May 1766 the Comtesse wrote their mutual friend David Hume: "Je vous ai dit, ce me semble, que j'ai fait connoissance avec M. Smith, et que, pour l'amour de vous, je l'avois fort accueilli." She then added: "Je lis actuellement sa théorie des sentimens moraux: je n'en suis pas fort avancée, mais je crois que cela me plaira."⁵ On 15 July 1766 Hume wrote the Comtesse: "I am glad you have taken my friend Smith under your protection: you will find him a man of true merit; though perhaps his sedentary recluse life may have hurt his air and appearance, as a man of the world."⁶ The Comtesse again mentioned Smith in a letter to Hume dated 25 July 1766: "J'ai fait prier votre ami Mr Smith de venir chez moi. Il me quitte à l'instant."⁷

Apparently after his visit, the Comtesse retained an interest in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and in Smith, too. When Gilbert and Hugh Elliot, the two sons of Adam Smith's friend Sir Gilbert Elliot, were in Paris in 1770, they visited the Comtesse de Boufflers, "who," wrote Hugh, "was at her studies in her bedchamber," when the young men called. "She received us very kindly," Hugh continued,

a letter to Thomas Gray (25 January 1766): "Madame de Boufflers, who was in England, is a *savante*, mistress of the Prince of Conti, and very desirous of being his wife. She is two women, the upper and the lower. I need not tell you that the lower is *galante*, and still has pretensions. The upper is very sensible too, and has a measured eloquence that is just and pleasing—but all is spoiled by an unrelaxed attention to applause. You would think she was always sitting for her picture to her biographer" (*Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven, 1948), XIII, 153).

⁴ Lord Elbank wrote Hume on 11 May 1763: ". . . when I assure you from Madame de Boufflers, that her only errand to England, where I had the happiness to attend her from Paris, was the hopes of meeting you at London. You cannot in Decency neglect the opportunity of gratifying this flattering Curiosity, perhaps passion, of the most aimable of God's Creation . . ." (*Letters of David Hume*, I, 388, n. 2). For a discussion of Hume's friendship with the Comtesse see Ernest Campbell Mossner's *The Life of David Hume* (Austin, Texas, 1954), particularly pp. 423-74.

⁵ John Hill Burton, ed., *Letters of Eminent Persons Addressed to David Hume* (Edinburgh, 1849), pp. 237-8.

⁶ *Letters of David Hume*, II, 63.

⁷ *Letters of Eminent Persons*, p. 245.

"and spoke about all our Scotch and English authors; if she had time, she would set about translating Mr. Smith's *Moral Sentiments*—'Il a des idées si justes de la sympathie.' This book is now in great vogue here; . . ."⁸ Although there seems to be no mention of the presentation copy or of the Comtesse's reaction to Smith's second publication in the Smith, Hume, or Boufflers correspondence, the Comtesse and Smith had at least indirect contact after 1776. On 26 November 1777 Edward Gibbon wrote Smith: "After a very pleasant summer passed in Paris where I often heard your name, and saw several of your friends particularly the Dutchess Danville [Duchesse d'Anville], and the Countess de Boufflers [Boufflers], I returned to England about the beginning of this Month."⁹

Written in another hand beneath the inscription to the Comtesse in the presentation copy is the following information: "This is Adam Smith's Hand writing / A.V.K." It is certain, however, that the inscription to the Comtesse is not an example of Adam Smith's handwriting. The writing does not resemble any of the specimens of Smith's handwriting reproduced by W. R. Scott in *Adam Smith as Student and Professor*; nor does it display any of the characteristics of Smith's writing described by Scott. After studying examples of Smith's handwriting, Scott has pointed out that Smith had, as others have observed, a "'round schoolboy hand,'" that he "had a tendency to raise his pen during the writing of a short word and sometimes more than once," and that he wrote "untidily." Smith, partly because of his difficulties in penmanship, employed amanuenses.¹⁰ The Catalogue of Adam Smith's Library in 1781, now housed at the Imperial University, Tokyo, is obviously the work of one of Smith's copyists;¹¹ indeed, the inscription to the Comtesse is very similar to the handwriting in this catalogue. If A.V.K. had seen this catalogue and falsely assumed the handwriting to be Smith's, then he would surely have concluded that the inscription was in Smith's hand, too.

When the third edition of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was being

⁸ The Countess of Minto, *A Memoir of the Right Honourable Hugh Elliot* (Edinburgh, 1868), p. 13.

⁹ Ernest Dilworth, "A Letter of Gibbon to Adam Smith," *RES*, new ser., X (1959), 401-2.

¹⁰ William Robert Scott, *Adam Smith as Student and Professor* (Glasgow, 1937), p. 359.

¹¹ Reproductions of the title page and miscellaneous pages of this catalogue may be found in *Adam Smith as Student and Professor* (pp. 390-1) and in Tadao Yanaihara's *A Full and Detailed Catalogue of Books Which Belonged to Adam Smith, now in the Possession of the Faculty of Economics, University of Tokyo* [1951] (New York, 1966).

published, Smith wrote on 10 August 1784, presumably to Thomas Cadell, William Strahan's partner, giving instructions concerning presentation copies:

I wrote to Strahan desiring a few presents to be made in my name before Publication, viz to Lady Louisa MacDonald, to Lords Stanhope, Mahon, Loughborough & Sheffield; to these let me add a Sixth to Sir Grey Cooper. The copy to Lady Louisa to be finely bound and Gilt; the rest in boards.¹²

On 16 November 1784 he issued further instructions:

To those which in my former letter I desired you to deliver as presents from the Authour I must beg the favour of you to add four more: one to Lord Shelburne; and three to the Marquis de Bombelles; one to the Marquis himselfe, one to the Duke of Rochefoucault; and one to the Dutchess Chabot, the sister of the Duke of Rochefoucault and the daughter of the Dutchess D'Anville. My Lord Shelburne will be so good as to deliver the three copies to the Marquis de Bombelles, who will be so good as to deliver at Paris the two copies for the Duke of Rochefoucault and the Dutchess Chabot.¹³

No doubt he gave similar instructions to Cadell when the first edition was being issued in 1776, but since Smith was in London at the time these instructions may well have been given orally so that no record of them remains. He also 'apparently gave special instructions for the binding of the Comtesse's copy as he did for Lady Louisa's copy, for the presentation copy in the Gettysburg College Library has calf bound boards with a gilt tooled spine and marbled end papers.

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¹² *Adam Smith as Student and Professor*, p. 291.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 292.